

August 10, 2016

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
U.S. House of Representatives
2206 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Carlos Curbelo
U.S. House of Representatives
1429 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Ros-Lehtinen and Curbelo:

Thank you for your leadership in addressing the significant threats facing our state's coral reefs through your recently introduced Conserving Our Reefs And Livelihoods (CORAL) Act. This bill includes numerous provisions to modernize and enhance efforts to conserve the coral reefs that are so valuable to our state's economy and culture.

Recreational fishing is a significant economic driver in Florida, generating \$9.3 billion in economic impact and supporting 123,000 jobs. The state's abundant fisheries, attributable to effective management by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, have earned Florida the title of "Fishing Capital of the World." Unfortunately, a variety of stressors threaten the health of our coral reefs. We greatly appreciate your efforts to champion solutions to these challenges.

As leading conservationists who care about and depend on a healthy marine environment, no one is more concerned about the health and restoration of coral reefs than the recreational fishing community. As you know, poor water quality, warming seas, ocean acidification, coral diseases and invasive species continue to result in die-offs of corals in Florida and throughout the world. However, instead of working to address these true challenges to coral reefs, too often we see proposals that inaccurately identify fishing pressure as a major threat to corals that therefore needs to be banned or greatly restricted. Doing so not only fails to fix the problem, but also marginalizes the one stakeholder group who most strongly supports coral restoration.

Thankfully, your CORAL Act recognizes the important economic role of corals reefs and will focus restoration efforts in a way that can effectively address long-term challenges. We particularly support language in the bill that prioritizes research to develop the cutting edge techniques and tools necessary for coral reef restoration; appropriately defines marine protected areas and the role of state fisheries agencies in these decisions; boosts efforts to combat invasive lionfish; and supports conservation of billfish.

We greatly appreciate your continued efforts to champion fisheries conservation issues affecting Florida. Thank you for all you do for our industry and the state.

Sincerely,

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